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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S. ARMS PROCUREMENTS, U.S.--
CHINA-TAIWAN RELATIONS

¶1. Summary: Major Chinese-language Taipei dailies focused their coverage September 17-19 on the outcome of the German elections, and local issues such as the sighting of a Chinese nuclear-powered submarine in the Taiwan Strait in July, and President Chen Shui-bian's upcoming trip to Central America and the Caribbean. Almost all Chinese-language newspapers in Taiwan reported in their inside pages on U.S. Department of State East Asia Bureau Senior Advisor James Keith's testimony last Thursday before a congressional commission, in which he said PFP Chairman James Soong passed on the message to China's President Hu Jintao last May that President Chen Shui-bian is willing to engage with Beijing while using a flexible formulation about what constitutes "one China." The newspapers also carried the Presidential Office's and People First Party's denials that Soong was asked to pass this message to Hu. The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, ran a banner headline on its page two September 18 that read: "[Chen Shui-] Bian reiterated that Taiwan and China are one country on each side [of the Taiwan Strait.]"

In terms of the U.S. arms procurement bill, several Chinese dailies reported in their inside pages that U.S. Representative Rob Simmons will head a delegation visiting Taiwan in October to discuss the U.S. arms procurement bill with Taiwan's opposition parties. The pro-independence "Taiwan Daily" also carried a front-page news story September 19 saying former Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui will hold a march in Taipei September 25 to call on the Taiwan people to support the passage of the U.S. arms procurement bill and to put an end to the boycotts in the Legislative Yuan.

¶2. In terms of editorials, the pro-unification "United Daily News" ran an editorial questioning whether Taiwan wants to engage in an arms race with China. The editorial said even though the United States plays an indispensable role in maintaining security across the Taiwan Strait, that does not mean that Taiwan has to follow every step the United States takes. A "Liberty Times" editorial, on the other hand, elaborated on President Chen's reiteration of "Taiwan and China being one country on each side of the Taiwan Strait," saying Taiwan needs to take action (e.g. rectifying its name and writing a new constitution) so as to become a normal country. An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" commented on President Chen's planned transits in the United States en route to Central America. The editorial urged the DPP government to "utilize the transit stops to constructively strike a balance between Washington, Taipei and Beijing." End summary.

¶1. U.S. Arms Procurement

"Has Taiwan Decided to Walk the Road to an Arms Race?"

The conservative, pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (9/19):

". What is more worrisome is that the so-called 'security impasse' across the Taiwan Strait may not be caused by the negligence of any side involved but possibly by actions taken during conflict between hegemonies in the Asia Pacific region. In terms of the U.S. containment of Beijing, Washington has been adopting more and more of the strategies that it once used to employ against the former Soviet Union, such as the island chain defense, stopping Beijing from acquiring military technology, and forcing Beijing to engage in an arms race by raising its defense budget and developing space weapons. Washington's pressure on Taiwan to pass the arms procurement bill is part of the United States' plan to force Beijing to engage in an arms race. The United States appears to plan to wear down China's economy, and it remains to be seen whether

Washington can achieve its aim. But during this process of attrition, Taiwan's economy might be undermined.

"Given the big picture in which Washington and Beijing are fighting for hegemonic power, it tests the rulers' wisdom with regard to how Taiwan can play an appropriate role. Nevertheless, Taiwan does not necessarily have to buy all the weapons as requested by the United States even though it only has limited room to act on its own. Take the three items of weaponry that Taiwan plans to buy as an example -- if Taiwan can make use of the conflict between Washington and Beijing skillfully, it may likely be able to acquire the weapons that it needs without having to pay such a high price. There are precedents that Taiwan can follow. .

"In addition, even though the United States plays an indispensable role in maintaining security across the Taiwan Strait, it does not mean that Taiwan has to follow every step the United States takes. In this regard, South Korea is a very good example: in the face of Pyongyang's threats, even though Seoul also has raised its defense budget, bought and produced many weapons, and maintains a military alliance with the United States, it still insists on abiding by its own independent principle when engaging with the North Korean administration. ."

12. U.S.-China-Taiwan Relations

A) "Without [Moving to] Rectify Its Name and Write a New Constitution, How Can Taiwan [Claim That It and China Are] One Country on Each Side of the Taiwan Strait?"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 600,000] editorialized (9/19):

"A senior adviser to the U.S. State Department said last week when testifying before the Congress that [PFP Chairman] James Soong had [passed a message to Beijing] when visiting China saying that President Chen Shui-bian is willing to adopt a more flexible approach with regard to the contents of one China and is willing to engage in a dialogue with Beijing. But both Chen and Soong denied it. Chen reiterated last Saturday that he will never take back or change the remarks he made in 2002 [asserting] that `Taiwan and China are one country on each side of the Taiwan Strait. .'

"The discourse about `Taiwan and China being one country on each side of the Taiwan Strait' must be carried out via actions. Also, corresponding measures to fulfill this discourse, namely, the moves to rectify Taiwan's name and write a new Constitution, must be adopted so as to turn Taiwan into a normal country. Taiwan people should applaud when President Chen emphasized that he will not retrieve or change his statement. But given China's increasingly severe suppression on Taiwan, verbal announcements alone were not enough. What Taiwan needs is action.

"It's a pity that when Premier Frank Hsieh assumed his position, he announced that the government would slow down the movements to rectify Taiwan's name and write a new Constitution, the move that will thus slow down the pace to make Taiwan a normal country. It goes without saying that Hsieh's announcement is a step moving backward when it comes to maintaining Taiwan's sovereignty. What happened [over the past few months] has proved that the DPP government's efforts in slowing down the moves to rectify Taiwan's name and write a new Constitution in exchange for the pan-Blue camp's agreement for reconciliation and co-existence were wasted in vain. [On the contrary,] China has been intensifying its united front tactics against the island. ."

B) "Striking a Balance in the U.S., Taiwan, China Triangle"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] commented in an editorial (9/19):

"President Chen Shui-bian will embark on a state visit to several of Taiwan's diplomatic allies in Central America and the Caribbean tomorrow with transit stops in Miami and San Francisco in the United States. . The presidential excursion coincides with several major events affecting the triangular relationship between the U.S., Taiwan and the People's Republic of China and therefore provide an essential opportunity for the Democratic Progressive Party government to utilize the transit stops to constructively strike a balance between Washington, Taipei and Beijing. .

". While reinforcing its security alliance in Asia to contain the spread of influence of the PRC military build-up, Washington needs Beijing's cooperation on issues involving North Korea, anti-terrorism and economic openness.

"In this regard, the timing and context of President Chen's transit stops will become a testing point for U.S.-Taiwan relations as well. It is fair to say that although ties between Taipei and Washington are in better shape when compared to two years ago, there are still those in the Bush administration that do not trust the DPP government. Washington's main concern continues to be over the impression that the DPP administration is constantly 'pushing the envelope' by strengthening the symbols of state sovereignty.

"Taiwan should cooperate with the U.S. in terms of increasing its visibility at the highest level and in practical and positive ways, but we should take care to avoid giving the impression that our moves to provide assistance to members of the world community have a 'gotcha' element that can make other countries and non-government organizations wary for what Taiwan is offering because it has strings attached. .

"To maximize the positive effect of his transit and to avoid misinterpretation from Washington, Chen should highlight Taiwan's democratic achievements and assets as well as express the strong desire [of] Taiwan to act as a partner in the global effort to promote democracy. . Chen should also reaffirm Taiwan's resolution to defend itself, in part by restating his position that defense spending should amount to three percent of our gross domestic product. We must not leave leaders in Washington thinking that Taiwan wants the U.S. to be the sole defenders of Taiwan from PRC aggression while Taiwanese do nothing to defend their democracy and sovereignty. .

"Nevertheless, efforts made solely by Taiwan is not good enough. The Bush administration must refrain from incorporating a double standard to treat Taiwan in the course of its engagement with Beijing.

"What Bush should really contemplate is the degree to which his administration can keep a balance safeguarding his own national interests and a full-fledged democratic Taiwan while engaging in building a 'constructive, candid and cooperative' relations with China. ."

KEEGAN